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The Corner

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The Corner

Sharon Wildey

The clang of the door caused Roger's stomach to tighten, as he stood helplessly watching that black iron thing restricting his freedom. Several minutes later he turned and glanced around the cell . . . only wanting to learn the room well enough not to fall over anything.

The ultimate insult of nothingness surrounded Roger. He fell on the bunk and stared . . . then slept.

An hour later Roger jerked awake at the sound of a metal key turning in the lock. Walking in with Sheriff Conrad was the Probation Officer, Mr. Wilson. He was a smiling young guy who talked nice . . . they always talked nice . . . Roger knew . . . knew not to trust him.

"We got to talk about it now, Roger."

Mr. Wilson evidently was going to do the talking. That would help, Roger decided.

"All we want to know is why."

"Fuck you."

"It won't do you any good to talk like that Roger. That's the kind of thing that always gets you in trouble."

"I did it because I wanted to."

"Why did you want to?"

"Just did."

"You know you will be sent to the Reformatory, don't you."

Roger knew that now was the time for the mercy act, and with a sigh he started into the routine. It was almost an effort . . . this time it was going to be just too easy.

"O.K.—O.K. I don't want to be sent there."

"We don't want to Roger, but you must talk to us."

"I'll talk, honest, what do you want to know?"

"Start with why you did it."

"My family doesn't have anything like money and there was this girl, you know, I didn't have any money to take her to this movie. So I

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thought I'd take it from old Nuss's store . . . he smarted off to me once, called me a punk."

"You know that was wrong, don't you, Roger?"

"Yes, Sir. But I didn't know what else to do. I just don't have anyone to help me. This girl want to see the movie bad."

"If I help you Roger will you give me your word not to do it again and to obey a few rules that I'll give you."

"Oh yes, Sir. Anything you tell me. It would be different to have a friend."

"Well . . . Roger that's why Judge Douglas hired me. He believes boys like you need friends. We don't treat you as a criminal for the very reason that we think we can help you."

Two days later, Roger stepped outside and breathed free air. Triumphant, he had managed to snow Mr. Wilson and the Judge, even the school counselor, who reluctantly agreed to take Roger back into school. Roger knew it sounded good to tell probation officers that you wanted to go back to school.

Roger walked the six blocks home with the intention of following his old habits: eat quickly, go out till 2:00 a.m. on the "corner," dodge the police, come home and sleep till noon. The thought flashed into Roger's mind that maybe he ought to go to school tomorrow. It amused him so much he was chuckling to himself as he walked through the front door of his apartment, the door that nobody ever bothered to close behind him. He glanced at his father over in the corner: beer, newspaper, and unshaven.

"Whadda you git outta it, kid?"

"Probation . . . extended two years."

"Sounds all right . . . better straighten up this time . . . you won't git many more chances."

"Yes . . . what's for supper?"

"Sausage and gravy."

"Where's Rosie . . . got something funny to tell her."

"Don't know . . . nobody seen her . . . couple of days now. She's gonna git herself knocked up if she ain't careful."

"Yea, guess so."

Roger knew why she'd rather be anywhere than home. The old man called it 'keepin' it in the family, but Roger knew how Rosie cried and he liked his sister.

It only took half an hour for Roger to eat, change clothes and arrive at the corner where all his friends hung out. Immediately the warmth of home surrounded Roger . . . 25th & Trent St. . . the living room for ten of Roger's peers. Their place . . . their sanctuary. Questions were

flying about the police and “Old Nuss.” Of course, Roger knew to shrug them off and appear seemingly only slightly annoyed by such a trivial happening. One hour led to another and Roger relaxed and lost himself in the safety of his world. A world with definite boundaries, like the light of a campfire that establishes an area that even the wolves do not invade.

An intruder was nearing the corner. Roger could tell by the group’s sudden tension. He turned slowly and confidently, as he was supposed to, thinking it was another group ready to start a fight or maybe “Old Nuss” himself.

“You fuckin’ bastard,” Roger screamed hysterically, “What are you doing here . . . you can’t . . .”

It was Mr. Wilson. Roger was swept by a wave of nausea, his mind whirling with the difficulty of realizing the dumb bastard didn’t know not to come to the corner. The knowledge of what Roger would be forced to do exploded in his head.

“You’re in violation of probation, Roger. You aren’t supposed to be here . . . you gave me your word . . . I don’t understand, Roger . . . after all the help we gave you . . . come with . . .”

Mr. Wilson simultaneously grabbed at the blood gushing from his chest, fell to his knees and stared unbelievably up at Roger, who stood watching the dumb bastard die.